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I WAS INTERNED

THE NAZIS
INTERINED ME

By
HENRY BULLER

A SERIES OF WARTIME
INTERNMENT EXPERIENCES

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Internment Begins

On the 13th of January 1943 we re-
ceived word that the State Department
had arranged for our admission with the
diplomatic group for repatriation to the
States. However, before we could join
the group at Lourdes, the Germans had
taken the entire group and interned
them at Baden-Baden. Then, on the 25th
of January, the French Prefecture,
through their police, notified us to go to
Mont Dore. Here at Mont Dore, a ski-ing
resort in the Central Massive mountains,
not far from Vichy, various South and
Central American diplomatic missions
were gathering to await their turn to be
taken into Germany for internment. The
group of North Americans, with the
South and Central Americans consisted
of eight persons, all relief workers: five
Quaker delegates or workers, and three
Mennonites, namely Sister Gunden, my
wife and myself.

We traveled with the special train of
South American diplomats to Bad Godes-
berg, not far from Cologne. Here we re-
mained over the week-end, until our lug-
gage could be taken out of the baggage
car. We had our meals in the hotel
where Chamberlain, Daladier, and Hitler
had one of their famous conferences in
the hectic pre-war period. In this hotel
the Latin-American diplomats were in-
terned. We, finally, arrived at Brenner's

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Park Hotel in Baden-Baden on the 16th
of February 1943. Then began a period
of a few days over a year of internment
for us—until February 19, 1944.

**"Badheim University, School, and
Library"**

The first thing that struck our at-
tention as we came into the lobby of the
hotel which was to be our "shelter" for
a year, was a large schedule headed
by the words, "Badheim University."
Underneath was a complete schedule of
various classes that were being carried
on by the members of the interned group.
There were classes in a number of lan-
guages (Russian, Italian, Spanish,
French, English, and German), history,
philosophy, economics, art, music, and
so on. In addition there were notices
of general interest lectures in the even-
ings. The motto of the "University,"
as we found out later, was, "That the
education of the ignorant, by the ignor-
ant, for the ignorant shall not perish
from the earth!" A light-hearted motto
but the work of the students and the pro-
fessors (all of whom received room and
board free) was serious. The "Univer-
sity" did much to occupy our minds use-
fully and to keep us from thinking too
much about our being kept, as it was, in
a "golden cage." There were some 1,386
registrations for classes and 638 credits
were given. Some 74 persons received

certificates of "graduation." This meant
that these persons had earned at least
four credits. One credit was given for
regular attendance for one class during
one term of classes. Each term was
from ten to twelve weeks long. We had
in all three terms of school: the Win-
ter term which ended with April, the
Summer term which ended with July,
and the Autumn term which ended just
before Christmas. Another Winter term
was started but it did not have very much
interest as we already knew that we
would be exchanged soon. The interest
was highest at the beginning of each
term and many dropped out as the term
progressed. But in general there was
continuous interest on the part of many.

There were eight children of school-
age among the group. For these child-
ren classes were specially organized—in
all of the possible fields that they would
find in a regular school. With the con-
sent of the parents and the children
themselves, these classes were made
compulsory. Some 20 members of the
group taught these children in the sub-
jects such as arithmetic, algebra, history,
American and English literature, and
so forth. Since they were of various
ages different classes had to be held for
the different levels.

For leisure reading and study, the lib-
rary that was started by a former lib-

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rarian from the American Library at Paris proved most helpful. At first the books in the library consisted of whatever books various members of the group contributed or loaned for group use. Later, some books were purchased in Baden-Baden and the International Y.M.C.A. of Geneva, Switzerland sent us numerous books for reading and study. Most helpful were some of the latest textbooks in various fields of study and dictionaries for the language classes.

"The Golden Cage"

The reference to "golden cage" is not a misnomer. The hotel in which we were kept was certainly one of the best in Baden-Baden. The rooms were pleasantly furnished—not so much luxuriously as home-like and agreeable. They were heated and kept clean by German hotel servants (some of which were French, Italian, or other workers from occupied countries).

The food was adequate in quantity and for the most part sufficiently varied to give us all the proper vitamins. However, it was not varied enough to avoid a good deal of monotony. Potatoes, cabbage, other course vegetables, and dark bread were the main items from day to day. The Red Cross parcels, which we received every fourteen days were certainly welcome for they provided some of the things we felt we needed

most: concentrated orange juice, dried raisins or prunes, meats, canned oleo-margarine, powdered milk, cheese, chocolate, and powdered coffee. The diet given us was low in meat, fats, milk, and fruits—besides some of the finer foods were quite rare, such as eggs and so forth. The ration of eggs was two a month and it was indeed seldom that we were served eggs in any recognizable form. They were mostly used in making puddings and pastries for desserts.

Walks and Sports

For physical exercise we were able to take walks in the surrounding Black Forest region. The walks were organized in such a manner that one could choose the speed one wished to walk. On Mondays, there were all-day walks when we took along light lunches which we ate in the woods and then returned to the hotel in the late afternoons. On the other days of the week there were either strolls, slow walks, or fast walks. All of the walks were enjoyed by many of the group throughout all the seasons of the year. In addition, we were given the privilege of playing on a near-by sports-field. Here we soon organized soft-ball games which provided a lot of lively interest and competition among the teams of the "Badheim" league. There were also opportunities for tennis and swimming.

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Buying of Daily Needs

There were limited possibilities for members of the group to go to town to do shopping. Of course, all the ordinary necessities such as shoes and clothing (and even shoe laces) were strictly rationed and one had to have a certificate from the local rationing board before being able to get anything. Simple things such as drugs, books, flowers, and small trinkets for gifts (such as were available, were purchased by one man and one woman who went out twice a week to do the shopping for the other members. The rest of us were, in principle, only allowed to go to town when we had a special ticket for some item of clothing or shoes.

Our Constant Shadows

All of the activities which took us beyond the grounds of the hotel were always with an inspector or agent of the "Gestapo" (Geheime Staats Polizei—Secret State Police) along. On our walks when the groups were a bit large there would often be two along. They came to dentists' and doctors' waiting rooms—waited with us until we were ready and returned to the hotel with us. Their job was three-fold: on the one hand to see that we would not make any contacts with the German people, and to protect us should we have been molested or at-

tacked by the German people. This latter service always seemed a bit unnecessary to us but of course they were responsible for our safety.

Religious Life of the Group

On Sundays we were allowed to go to either the local Catholic Church or the Protestant Church. Many of the members of the diplomatic group were Catholic and the group going to that church was usually quite numerous. To me most helpful and inspirational were the Quaker meetings that were held in the hotel, every Sunday, either just before noon or toward evenings. Moments of quietness—when a small group of us gathered to meditate upon things eternal and when we allowed our thoughts to lead us to the Eternal. There were also hymn-singing gatherings on Sundays and toward the end of the internment inter-denominational meetings were held every other Sunday.

In general the morale of the group was good and there was lively interest in the activities that required group action and support, such as dramatic productions and special programs. Still, it was a trial for us to be basically idle. We thought of the work that we had left in France and wished many a time that we might have stayed on with the people we had tried to help during trying times and whom we had learned to love. We

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also thought of the work that we might be doing at home—and found it hard to be patient, waiting for the day that we might once more take up the tasks in which we were interrupted when we left France. It was also hard for us to live so leisurely and peacefully when there were so many in the world that were starving and suffering from lack of adequate shelter. Within the group there were the difficulties of getting along with those of different habits and out-look on life. But to me the internment at Baden-Baden proved a great “university” of practicing patience and tolerance.

We were most happy when in the early days of February of this year we received word that the exchange would actually take place. On the 19th of February we left by special train to Biarritz, France, and after a momentary wait there of four days continued on to Lisbon, Portugal. From here we embarked on the Swedish motorship “Gripsholm” on March 5th and arrived, without any mishaps of any kind, at Jersey City on March 15th. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God...” Romans 8:28. We thank God for His constant care for us and guidance and for bringing us safely home again.